

NEWS

Rift over Gaza blog post rocks Green Party

By Michelle Zilio | Jul 28, 2014 4:54 pm | 4 comments |



The Green Party of Canada is distancing itself from a controversial blog post written by its president blaming the ongoing crisis between Israel and Gaza on Hamas.

Green Party President Paul Estrin posted the more than 2,100-word blog, titled “Why Gaza makes me sad,” on the party’s blog page last week.

Going against the party’s position of “engaged neutrality” on the conflict between Israel and Palestine, Estrin’s rambling blog post urged the “green movement” not to support Hamas, which governs Gaza Strip. Estrin also

blamed the media for vilifying Israel.

“When Gazans are asked what they want, they want peace ... and yet the world cheers on Hamas that spends the money and resources needed for infrastructure, housing, hospitals, schools, and buys weapons, builds tools for terror. I cannot help but feel sad for this world. And we, as a green movement, should not be supporting such a movement or government .. yes, their flag is green, but that is where the resemblance stops. Or at least, that is where it should stop.”

The Green Party president went on to argue that while Israel does all it can to protect the lives its citizens and those it is attacking, “Gaza does all in its power to have all the more die.”

Estrin’s anti-Hamas commentary goes strongly against a resolution adopted by the Green Party at its national convention on July 20. The resolution calls for the “immediate cessation of hostilities between Israel and Palestine” and the opening of all diplomatic avenues in the Palestinian Territories and Israel to press for a peaceful resolution consistent with the Green Party’s “commitment to justice and custom of speaking truth to power.”

Speaking to iPolitics Monday, Green Party Leader Elizabeth May said she didn’t see Estrin’s post until Monday morning, as she was on holiday over the weekend.

“I was profoundly surprised by the post,” said May. “I immediately responded to a lot of backup of Twitter questions to me, to say those are not my views, those are not the party’s views, that’s not our position as a party.”

While the July resolution has yet to be approved by all party members, May said that based on the feedback she received during the Green Party’s convention in Fredericton July 18 to 20, she is confident members will support the party’s direction on the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Some Green party members expressed distaste with Estrin's position in the comments section of the blog post. For instance, one commenter, identified as Alex Hill, said they were "never expecting to hear such propaganda" while another named Colette Belanger was so "shocked, disheartened and disappointed" with Estrin's position that she asked for her membership to be rescinded.

In the original blog post, cached here, Estrin signed the post as the president of the Green Party of Canada and made no mention of differentiating between his personal position and that of the party. But as of Monday morning, the Green Party appeared to be distancing itself from Estrin's opinions.

According to the party's Director of Communications Julian Morelli, Estrin's title was removed from the blog post Monday morning and an edit noting the change was added below his signature line.

Edit: I realize I initially signed this document with my name and title. I have removed my title because I want to make it as clear as possible that my words are my own, what I have written is my perspective.

A note from the moderator was also added at the top of Estrin's post, saying that members' blogs are representative of the members themselves and are not official party policy; the note also pointed to the Green Party's recent resolution on the Israel-Palestine conflict. According to Morelli, any Green Party member can sign in and blog on the website, as Estrin did.

"This is a member-driven site, the blog site. Its primary intention was to allow for debate, conversation and opinion. And there's no plans to remove it (Estrin's blog post) from the website because it's Mr. Estrin's personal view," said Morelli in a phone conversation with iPolitics Monday.

Morelli added that there has been no indication that Estrin will step down as president of the party following his blog post.

May refused to say whether she thought it was appropriate for Estrin to make such anti-Hamas statements.

“It’s not for me to say whether its appropriate or inappropriate,” said May. “He was elected by the membership of the party ... This issue never came up in the context of questions put to him by the membership. The president of the party is responsible for governance of the party and doesn’t haven’t any role in policy.”

The questions surrounding Estrin’s blog post comes as all federal parties’ face scrutiny for their positions on the Israel-Hamas conflict. The Conservatives have asked donors to show their support by standing with the Conservatives as they “stand with Israel” and attacking the Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau for not supporting Israel. The Liberals, on the other hand, have said they don’t want to make the conflict a partisan issue. The NDP, which has traditionally supported the Palestinian side of the conflict, has been more equivocal on the issue, expressing concern about civilians being killed in Gaza while emphasizing Israel’s right to defend itself against Hamas.

May said she is the only federal party leader that has said anything critical of Israel, pointing to the following comments in her keynote at the Green Party convention:

“I condemn Hamas as a terrorist organization for sending missiles into Israel, but the Israeli retaliation and the invasion of Gaza violates international law and humanitarian norms, and any Prime Minister of Canada worth his or her salt would say that as a friend and ally of Israeli, ‘You’ve gone too far – you must move to peace talks.’”

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